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OFFICIAL PROGRAMME

NEW ZEALAND v AUSTRALIA

at Newmarket Park

Sunday 29th February 1976

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AUSSIES POSE THREAT TO TRUMAN'S RECORD

By

JOSH EASBY

Today's clash with Australia — and the return fixture at Melbourne in a few days time — will be vital to the career of New Zealand coach Barrie Truman.

For at stake today is Truman's five-year unbeaten record for internationals played in New Zealand. Since he was appointed as the national director of coaching in May 1970, the quietly-spoken Englishman has only once turned out a losing side on home soil. And that's some record when compared with national coaches of the past.

Truman's first charge was the New Zealand team which lost 1-0 to Wales at Newmarket Park in 1971. But since then, Truman's career has taken many turns, the last of which veered sharply upwards with New Zealand's successful ten-match tour of China and Asia last year.

His first three seasons were only fair, with Truman-coached national sides slowly building up an international reputation. Those three seasons ended on a sour note with New Zealand being bustled out of the World Cup elimination series in Australia. Truman's controversial team selections in those games provoked several loud cries for his dethroning.

During the next year — 1974 — the cries softened but mainly because New Zealand did not face any international competition. His critics started buzzing again early last year. At the annual general meeting of the NZFA, a remit was tabled which, if it had been accepted, would have effectively pushed Truman out of his job as New Zealand team coach. He would have remained as national director of coaching but a new man, probably Mount Wellington's Ken Armstrong, would have taken charge of the Kiwis.

Truman battled the storm and could only wait for the chance to re-affirm his claim to the hot seat of coaching. That opportunity came last July when New Zealand met China in three internationals, the first games played by the national side in almost two years.

New Zealand, of course, won the series then thrashed a sub-standard Indonesian side 8-0 before leaving on its trek across Asia. The rest is history and Truman's critics have been largely silenced.

But now Truman faces a new challenge, the chance to show he has really got on top of his job. The challenge is next year's World Cup venture when New Zealand will meet Australia and Taiwan in an elimination series. Without much doubt, the series will be between the Kiwis and Brian Green's Socceroos, with the Australians going out as favourites.

This week's double-header against Australia will show Truman how much work needs to be done if New Zealand is to win the preliminary series. No doubt Australian coach Brian Green will also be using this week's games for much the same reason. So it's vital for Truman that he should come out on top.

I discussed this week's matches with Truman when he returned with the Kiwis from Asia in November.

He made no bones about the fact that next year's World Cup clashes with Australia are the games he is giving top priority to. And rightly so. In comparison, this week's games and September's Oceania tournament in Fiji are only small fry.

But that doesn't mean Truman is unworried about today's result. For today's match will be the toughest New Zealand has played since it met Iran in August 1973. Since the Iran game, the national side has changed quite a bit.

Truman believes his present squad will provide the bulk of next year's World Cup squad. The tour of China and Asia did much to sort out the men from the boys. Today Truman will find out which players can foot it against crack opposition.

However Australia has one large advantage for today's match. Socceroos have been in training camp virtually non-stop since December. They played a series against Russia and games against a Yugoslav side in January. As a result, the Aussies should be match fit and well prepared for today's game.

On the other hand, last year's heavy commitments faced by Truman's players have taken their toll. Players were expected to take time off work for about ten days for the China series, a couple of days for the Indonesians and almost six weeks off work for the Asian tour. As a result, the Kiwis have virtually exhausted their employers' patience. For today's match, the national side could only manage two full days of team preparation in Auckland.

Another problem faced by the Kiwis has been the lack of top opposition since returning from Asia. Take the Mount Wellington players for instance.

This year, they have played a couple of friendly matches against lowly opposition and three Air New Zealand tournament games. Three weeks ago, Mount played Grey Lynn, a week later they played Oratia United and last week they played Glenfield Rovers.

FLASHBACK . . . a packed Newmarket Park crowd celebrates like it never has before. The reason: New Zealand's Brian Turner has opened the scoring against Australia in the 1973 World Cup elimination clash. The game finished 1-1.

Today half that Mount Wellington side will play against Australia: and be expected to lift their games accordingly. It's a lot to ask for but they have little choice. Naturally it is not only the Mount players who are facing this dilemma but the whole national side.

Should New Zealand succeed against Australia, what is next on the agenda? I understand a New Caledonian squad may be touring New Zealand this year and it could provide some opposition for Truman's lads. Then it is the Oceania tournament in Fiji.

If all goes to plan, New Zealand should have a decent build-up to its World Cup campaign. But, for the moment, the Australians provide the first obstacle.

New Zealand's record in matches against Australia is well above average. The Aussies have only beaten the Kiwis once in ten years and have not beaten New Zealand on home soil for almost 20 years.

Consequently today's New Zealand side will be fighting not only to preserve their own record against Australia but Truman's as well. New Zealand's international record since Truman took over in 1970 is as follows:

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G'DAY TO THE WIZARDS OF OZ

Australia's Socceroos will be well prepared for today's game. In December, they were in full training camp for their series with Russia and since then they have been preparing for an Olympic Games preliminary series in Indonesia. However the Aussies withdrew from the Olympic tournament when it was ruled that they could not send their 1974 World Cup squad to the Jakarta tournament. But nevertheless, the Australians have had more preparation than their New Zealand counterparts who only gathered in Auckland two days ago.

★ ★ ★

Two Rothmans Soccer League clubs will be able to boast new internationals today if Kevin Weymouth and Graham "Gumboots" Storer take the field. Because both players have changed clubs since returning from New Zealand's ten-match tour of China and Asia late last year. Striker Weymouth has joined Mt Wellington from North Shore United and link man Storer has left New Brighton for Christchurch United.

★ ★ ★

Australia will be showing plenty of new faces in their two-match series with New Zealand this week. Of the squad named by Socceroos coach Brian Green, only six were around at the time of the 1974 World Cup finals in Munich. Captain Peter Wilson, Jim Rooney, George Harris and Peter Ollerton had all won caps at that stage and goalkeeper Allan Maher was named in the Munich squad though he did not play. The sixth pre-1975 Socceroo was fullback Doug Utjesenovic, a player who played 30 games with the famouf OFK Belgrade team before emigrating to Australia when he was 23.

★ ★ ★

Today's match will be doubly important if a meeting held this weekend was successful for Australian Soccer Federation secretary Brian Le Fevre. The meeting concerned Aussie's request to join Oceania again after a four-year absence caused by the ASF's withdrawal in 1972. If all went to plan — and Australia is back in the Oceania fold — it will mean New Zealand will be playing the Socceroos again at September's Oceania tournament in Fiji. For Kiwi coach Barrie Truman, today's game is vital preparation for next year's World Cup bid in which we meet Australia. And today's game could well serve as preparation for the Oceania meet in which New Zealand will be defending its title.

Australia's present manager is former professional Eric Worthington. He took over as national coaching director in 1973 with financial support from the Rothmans Sporting Foundation Trust. Australia's coach is another former professional, Brian Green, who took over from flamboyant Rale Rasic after the last World Cup.

★ ★ ★

There are several Australian players — who were in the squad for December's series against Russia — who have not made the squad for today. Among the missing names are Ernie Campbell and the first Aborigine ever to play for Australia, Harry Williams. Two other players, both from Western Australia, have also missed out. They are Ray Ilott and Gary Marocchi, both of whom were coached by former New Zealand international Allan Vest last year.

★ ★ ★

Australia's international reputation obviously swelled after its World Cup finals appearance in Munich — but there is some doubt as to its value to Australia. Brian Le Fevre, the ASF secretary, was over here for last year's Lion Chatham Cup final and at a Soccer Writers' Association dinner he revealed that crowds in Sydney have dropped since the World Cup. Le Fevre and another leading official, Vic Tuting, were so impressed at the Blockhouse Bay-Christchurch United cup final, they went home and recommended today's match.

★ ★ ★

Another Australian loss caused by the World Cup was the transfer of top-notch striker Adrian Alston to Britain. English Second Division club Luton Town paid Alston's club, Safeway United, an Australian transfer fee record of $20,000 to obtain his services. Alston has since moved to Cardiff City where he has hit the big time. Last month, Alston became a household name overnight by almost scoring the fastest goal ever in the English Football League. He took a shot at goal from Cardiff's kick-off and the ball just scraped the outside of his opponents' goal. If it had gone in, officials who saw the shot replayed on television estimated the goal would have been scored in less than six seconds. And talking of quick goals, the record for the quickest goal ever scored in an official Australian match was 63 seconds. The scorer was Artie Walker playing for Wallsend against Kurri in 1928.

THE MOST publicised goal-miss of 1973 as New Zealand's Geoff Brand fails to connect with the ball when only six metres from Australia's goal. Brand's miss came minutes from the final whistle during the World Cup elimination match at Newmarket Park.

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